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MILITARISM—THE ENEMY OF CIVILIZATION

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY, MARCH 26, 1899

BY

JOSEPH MAY

PASTOR OF THE FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA

THE UNITARIAN BOOK-ROOM
1708 CHESTNUT STREET
PHILADELPHIA

A sermon by Rev. Joseph May is regularly published, at the expense of the First Unitarian Church, each month, from October to May, inclusively.

Copies are gratuitously distributed at the Church and at the Unitarian Book Room, 1708 Chestnut Street.

Post-office Missions will be supplied with any number desired, on reasonable terms.

Persons wishing to receive these sermons by mail, can obtain them at the rate of half-a-dollar for each annual series.

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4-99-1500

MILITARISM—THE ENEMY OF CIVILIZATION.

"*They that take the sword, shall perish by the sword.*"
—MAT. XXVI: 52.

A FACT, lately reported, in two lines, by the newspapers, has really a grave significance. It is this: the President having to commission, in our new-made army, one or two hundred officers of the lower grades, there were received, at the War Department, within a few days, *sixty thousand* applications for appointment to those positions.

I beg you to carry this fact in your minds, and reflect upon all that it means. It means first, that, in our country which ought to be so prosperous,—and perhaps seems to be so,—sixty thousand young men, of such age, social relations, intelligence and education as would fit them to become lieutenants are so loosely related to the active world as to need and be tempted to seek occupation in the trade of war. This is serious enough, as a token of the times, from the business point of view.

But, what is for worse in my eyes,—a thing every lover of his country, and especially every true lover of the democratic principle, must deplore,—it is a peculiar token of the recrudescence of the war-spirit, the awakening of the military instinct among our people.

It is one thing for citizens, fired by patriotism, to come forward, at the call of government, to support it in the actual exigency of even a bad war. It is another, that the orderly profession of arms should begin to allure the ambition of our youth; that *militarism* should become an established factor in the characters and lives of our population.

When, at the outset of the secession movement, nearly forty years ago, the manhood of the country, aroused by the peril of our Constitution, gathered in immeasurable volume and poured itself out, a living flood, to quench the fires of disunion, there was no prevailing element of

military ardor in the men's enthusiasm. They went forth to stern duty, in the spirit of self-sacrifice. The spirit of military ambition was conspicuously deficient in our volunteers. When the war was over, the great armies of the North melted back into civil life, instantly, as if rejoiced to be set free from a hateful service. The nation returned to the ways of peace, breathing freely from its long and unaccustomed strain. Our standing army was not materially increased. The whole terrible experience, heroic from a military point of view, had been so essentially civic in its quality, that it confirmed, encouragingly, the conviction of our being a radically peace-loving community.

Yet, not the most justifiable war,—and in civilized times it is hardly possible that any war should be justifiable,—not any war waged for the most genuine and defensible ends, *can be* waged without serious moral evils resulting. The thorough unselfishness of spirit in the war for the Union, its elevated motive, the presence in our armies of such a large proportion of high-minded, educated men, defended us measurably—even greatly,—from such evils. But they were *there*. And the worst of them has manifested itself during this last year—namely, the implanting in our citizens of the war-spirit, the development of militarism.

I confess I was astonished, as I was deeply chagrined, by the way in which our population responded to the call of the Spanish War. I have not changed, in the least, my judgment of that event, as expressed to you just before its outbreak. I hold it to have been as superfluous, and for that reason alone, as unjustifiable and wicked, as it was prematurely brought on and blunderingly managed. In its motive and inception, it was a politician's expedient, to which, with unsurpassed adroitness, the men whose interests it was to serve, gathered the forces, ever so ready in our community, of the humanitarian sentiment. The sentiment of philanthropy certainly continued the dominant one in the minds of our people. But it was far from being the only one which was evoked, and

the readiness with which we accepted war; the eagerness of so large a portion of the people for it; the alacrity of our young men to engage in it, the popular enthusiasm over our victories; the idealization of the men who have led in our successes; have been painfully significant of the presence among us of the war-spirit, to a degree which gives me, at least, very anxious forebodings for our republican experiment.

Our political corruptions are enough to discourage any but the stoutest optimistic heart. If we are to add to these evils, the development of militarism, our national future becomes distinctly precarious. If our enormous power as a people is to be directed by the genius of warfare, it is impossible to foresee the complications into which we shall be led among the nations, or their disastrous consequences, material and political as well as moral, to ourselves.

The word I am using—militarism—is new. It has arisen under the exigencies of modern days to formulate the idea of the enormous extent, and the terrible, scientific orderliness of the preparations for warfare now existing among the great nations. It implies the organization, as seen in Europe, of whole populations into standing armies, always ready for service.

But the *thing* is only new in its proportions, its elaborateness and the terrible instruments it commands; and the underlying principle is as old as human nature. It goes back beyond the period of our *humanity*, to that in which men were still only brutes. It is the principle of self-assertion, in its highest form, supported by the enormous material power of great peoples, and directed to utilize all the gains of science and civilization in the interest of brute-force.

Militarism is the orderly expression, in forms now methodical and costly beyond description, of the principle formulated in the ancient and infidel maxim, "Might makes right." It organizes the animal propensity, so soon as there arises any conflict of interest, to resort, not to rational processes of mutual consideration and concilia-

tion but to physical strife. It invests the heroes of force with a lustre which the men of intellect, of religion, of art, of benevolence, cannot attain. It blinds the eyes of the people to their true interests. Under its influence, men discredit the principles which have been dear and which are most highly essential to their welfare—as we are seeing to-day among our own people. The spirit of conquest aroused among us, flouts to-day the axioms of our immortal Declaration of Independence.

How can this be so, my friends? How can a population of quiet people, pursuing the avocations out of which their comfort and welfare are procured, be excited to the terrible excesses of war's pecuniary extravagance, of cruelty mutually inflicted by combatants utterly unknown to each other, to the rage of battle, to murder, incendiarism and rapine?

It is perfectly plain, how. It is simply because in our race, still imperfectly advanced in a true and high civilization, there lingers, below our culture, below our morality, below our religion, the element of *barbarism*, the quality of the *brute*. Within the limits of orderly communities, in the relations of *individuals*, this element of our nature has been taught restraint. Society has been possible because, at length, the assertion of the brute in the relations of life has been found incompatible with the orderly, decent and happy life which communities have resolved to maintain, and they will no longer tolerate it that individuals should vindicate even their clearest rights by physical force. The majority simply will not permit citizens who disagree to fall to fighting in our streets. If two of you have a cause of dissension, no longer may you saddle your horses, and with armor and arms, meet each other, backed by your retainers, in such contests as were habitual in feudal times. Civilized societies ordain laws, provide courts of justice, and absolutely insist on peace among their members. The brute exists in us all. Passion exists in the most refined, as a rudiment of feeling. But so far has civilization advanced, the lower propensities are restrained to the point of practical non-

existence. On the borders of civilized lands,—in Arizona and New Mexico—private warfare is still practised. Our Southern fellow-citizens defy law and cruelly murder defenceless accused persons—at least those of a different color. Occasionally, a riot breaks out in more polished communities, in which classes of men, more brutal than the rest, for a moment assert themselves and fling themselves against the forces of order and government. But, effectively, in private relations, the brutality which was rampant in barbarous periods, and which controlled all in the still earlier times of savagery, is conquered and as an overt fact, extirpated.

But, as between *peoples*, over which a common law has not yet extended itself, authoritatively, the same citizens who will not tolerate brutalism among themselves, still uphold brute-force as a justifiable principle of mutual behavior and means of adjusting their differences. They rejoice in its horrible deeds. They invoke it enthusiastically. The principle underlying international war is *exactly the same* as that of the duel or the street fight. But it is still possible to glorify it, and for civilized men to practice it at the end of the nineteenth century of Christianity.

This, I say, is simply due to the survival of *barbarism* in civilized times and peoples. It marks the limit of all that religion, science, culture have so far been able to do in lifting men above the brute to the nature and condition of children of God.

I am not saying that it is yet possible to abandon all resort to force in maintaining the institutions of men, and the good order of communities. So long as there linger barbarous elements in a community, and criminal individuals and classes ready to break the peace of civilized society, so long some orderly force will be required, as in cities we maintain the police. Perhaps the day, even of warfare, is not wholly past, although I believe it never need be necessary now, if any nation will on its own part fixedly maintain justice, manifest consideration and persevere in a self-controlled policy of internal civilization. Would

all the civilized nations together, abandoning selfish greed, devote themselves, severally, to the real interests of their peoples, it would never occur again. What I am saying implies that, however it should occur, it would still exhibit the deficiency of the world's civilization. War is the device of the *barbarous* period of social progress. If practised by civilized peoples, in some crucial exigency, it should still be deemed, like capital punishment, a horrible and tragic thing, not to be glorified in, but penitentially to be lamented before Almighty God. What militarism does, is to entrench this barbarism as a permanent fact in civilization; to gild it over so that its brutality is not clearly seen by civilized eyes. *And this is the comprehensive evil of militarism. It makes it, at this moment, the most effective foe of human progress, the most difficult obstacle in the way of advancing civilization.*

The actual facts of warfare are forever horrible. I once saw a series of photographs taken after the battles of the Civil War, so shocking in their realistic presentation of the scenes of carnage that they were never deemed fit for publication. The French government prohibited the circulation of the novels of Erckmann-Chatrian, as the Russians did the pictures of one of their greatest painters, because they would tend to discourage enlistment. They told the truth too plainly. If we could see the effects of the hideous volleys which our brothers and friends are now engaged in pouring in upon the half naked bodies of the Philippinos, we should doubtless be revolted beyond measure, and loudly demand that such brutalities should cease. One could hope that the sufferings of our men in the miserable Cuban campaign might, at least, have this recompense, that the brutalism, the moral vulgarity, of such a means of settling disputes, still more of enforcing righteousness, might forever be imprinted on our national consciousness.

But, alas, I fear—so powerful is the barbaric strain which lingers in civilized men,—that these things seem to have, as yet, no appreciable effect in quelling the war-spirit and dissipating the illusions of a false glory.

Of course, we must remark that, in all ages, and still what goes far to obscure the evil and wickedness of the war method is that, in individual combatants, while it unquestionably brutalizes, hardens, coarsens men, and makes them cruel and indifferent to suffering; it also evokes, in limited measure, some noble qualities. If you have any doubt as to the former class of effects, it would suffice to read of the campaigns of Alva in the Netherlands, or Tilly in the Palatinate, or of the armies of the French Republic, or of the English in India, or of the petty but savage wars by which we have exterminated the aborigines of this country. Yet, especially in modern days, heroism, self-sacrifice, endurance, moral as well as physical courage, generosity, with intellectual alertness, strategic skill, discipline and the power over men —these and other fine qualities are developed wherever men unselfishly accept the function of the soldier. If the motive of the war be elevated, as it was in our Civil War; as among our population it became last year; even communities are exalted by their sacrifices and measurably defended from the evil moral effects of wars.

But these facts do not touch the question of the actual character of warfare in itself. It remains a *brute* expedient wholly inconsistent with civilization, as it is with religion and morality. It violates all the principles of Christian ethics, as it offends against the refinement which is the last grace of civilized progress. In calling in the methods of barbarism to assist its exigencies, civilization imperils all the bulwarks it has erected for its own defense. But the achievements of civilization are too dearly purchased to be risked by the voluntary return of communities to barbarous ways. It is dangerous to treat the domesticated beast to blood. And no bad lesson is more readily learned by nations than that of military ambition. Hence it is that the recrudescence of militarism is, for our country, a fact so portentous. Militarism makes the war-method the established fact of civilized order. It is warfare made chronic, with all its demoralizing effects. See what it does in Germany and France! Those nations

are living in the atmosphere of war and its passions. All their ideals are colored by it. The Emperor of Germany seems the god Thor incarnate. The population is a vast machine of destruction, ever ready, and each citizen is deeply permeated with the sentiments which belong to his trade as soldier. In France, the apotheosis of the army leads to the utter annihilation of justice, as has lately been shown. The war-spirit, the hatred of Germany which it sustains by making revenge a feasible hope, is utterly corrupting that nation, and hastening it on the downward path which Spain has trodden to the end.

If we, in America, my friends, cannot check the uprising of this spirit of militarism, if we cannot resist the development of militarism in our institutions, our civilization will receive such a check as it defies forethought to imagine. It is working, at this moment, as a gangrene on the hearts of our people. And yet we see but the beginning. The tissue of events, which have brought us to where we are, are lamentable. They have seemed like a terrible accident,—if such a term might be used in a world where all is providential. And *they* are providential, because they are the natural result of false steps, inconsiderately taken, under the leadership of unprincipled statesmen and the hasty and mistaken impulse of inconsiderate philanthrophy. But we ought, with vision clarified by the terrible incongruity of our present course as a nation, now and daily to be lifting up our voices at the things we are doing, against the complications into which we are hastening, and above all against the tendencies we are fostering in our national life.

In a republic, militarism is the most dangerous of influences. Its whole spirit is antagonistic to the personal independence of character which is the noble fruit of free institutions, and is congenial with that subordination of peoples to governing classes, and to a single head, which belongs to monarchies. And, historically, militarism has, in republics, always tended to imperialism, and again and again brought about the ruin of the repub-

lican experiment. The exigencies of warfare are sure to call for that efficiency which is found in the absolute domination of a single head. In republican times, when war pressed hard with the Romans, they chose a dictator. At length they submitted to an emperor. So has France done twice within, to so speak, our memory. If we should become a military republic, one of two things would assuredly result—imperialism, or the breaking up of our nation into disunited and antagonistic States.

I entreat you not to regard these warnings as chimerical. Cassandra was rejected, but she had told the truth. They bring up the last and worst possibility; one I ardently hope and firmly trust will be averted by the recovery of a saner mood among our people, and the reassertion of their wiser and nobler instincts. But national decline and extinction have been the recurring phenomena of human history. The earth is strewn with the wrecks of great nations, which perished through the decay of the virtues which had been their strength. Assyria, Egypt, Rome—where are they? To what has Spain, once the great power of Europe, been reduced! The decline of France becomes an ominous present fact, which chills the hearts of her true patriots. That we are becoming permeated with the virus of forces inimical to the health and vigor of our nation is so clear that our pressing question, at this moment, seems to be whether our national constitution has vitality to endure the strain. Add to what we are actually suffering, the immense influence of the morbid forces of militarism, and it is no idle or pessimistic fear that holds up to us the vision of national decay.

But, apart from such anxieties as these, as to events which, at the worst, we might hope should still be distant, it is sufficient to see clearly the present inconsistency of militarism with the generous spirit of democracy, and the immediate practical and moral evils of which it is the source. If you will reflect upon it, as it is now organized in Europe, you will see that it is, literally, as I have called it, the one great foe of progressing civilization.

It is such merely from its enormous, its bewildering costliness. A few years ago I spoke to you on this particular theme—the terrible waste of war. Little did we think, then, that, carrying still the immense burthen of pensions, inherited from our great civil struggle, we should presently be plunged into such expenditures as those of the last year have been, and those we are now incurring. The amount of money actually appropriated by our last Congress, for expenses growing out of the Spanish war, was over $482,000,000. Indirectly, the cost was vastly more than even this gigantic sum. Including new pensions, contracts for new ships, and the campaign (if we may so dignify our ignoble raids) in the Philippines, it is, probably, already near a thousand millions! The imagination is baffled in the attempt to figure to itself such sums. Where are they to come from, my friends? Let me illustrate my point of to-day by saying—from the resources of civilization. The cost of militarism is the tax which civilization pays to barbarism A single war ship costs, to build and maintain it in commission (think of it, my friends), as much as a well-equipped university! All that is annually spent on libraries, art-institutions, for refined pleasures, even for public-school education, would be swallowed up by a few days of warfare; even consumed by the preparations, or for the results of warfare. The schools of this State have latterly cost five and a half millions annually, although thirty thousand children in this city are deprived of their privilege for the want of school houses, and our Governor declares that the estimates must be reduced. Five and a half millions of dollars would scarcely build and equip two first-class ships of war.

I can but refer, now, to the sums which all the great European nations spend on this relic of barbarism. They were formerly inconceivable to us, as burthens to which intelligent communities would submit, and irrational beyond description. Let not familiarity with such figures in our own estimates lead us to an acquiescence in such profligate waste. Remember, friends, it is these barbarous ex-

penditures that keep the private citizens of European nations poor. It has been expressed in the saying that the war-system puts a soldier on the back of every civilian. Beautiful, fertile Italy is actually bankrupt as a nation; the people are individually impoverished by her military expenses. Even rich and prudent England at last encounters a deficit.

While such extravagances—all, the needless tax of barbarism on civilization—go on, civilization must halt. The comfort of homes, the conveniences of civic life, education, art, all that goes to procure that happy thing, civic prosperity, must needs be restricted The people of Europe give up their earnings and pinch themselves as to the necessities of life, that they may make these costly offerings to the Moloch of war. To all this, we have to add the diversion of the mental and moral energies of a people from the ennobling arts of peace with all their fruits of comfort and happiness, and the disastrous interruptions to the educational and business careers of individual men compelled, on the threshold of active life, to leave their homes and occupations and serve their terms in the armies. I have repeatedly met men whose careers as scholars or business men had been radically checked and thwarted so. In a word, like a vampire, militarism sucks the life-blood of the European peoples. So it will do ours, if we foolishly let it. I say, again, *militarism is the one great present obstacle to the progress of civilization. It consumes the means needed for civilization.*

But it is still worse as a moral influence hostile to civilized progress. As it exists in Europe, it deeply distorts and taints personal character. It holds up thoroughly false ideals of personal and national greatness. The very virtues which it fosters (and such there are, and I have always done justice to them, in speaking of the military character) go out towards a false aim, the general effect of which is a hardening of spirit, a brutalizing of the feelings, very evident in the characters of European men in respect to the finer relations of life. The contemptuous attitude of the military towards the civil class in Germany is a sufficient

illustration here. The persistence of the duel in Europe is another. The licentious vice which accompanies militarism as a congenial fact, due to the unnatural status of the soldiery isolated from domestic life in the full warmth of youthful manhood, is another. A recent writer declares that, in this respect, a French barracks is a "hell upon earth." It was publicly declared, at a meeting in this city, by one who seemed to have studied the facts, that the worst part of the disease which decimated our soldiery last summer and sent home those thousands of miserable physical wrecks, was due to the vices into which they had been led.

But, in their whole essence, the spirit and system of militarism are, as I have said, peculiarly inconsistent with republicanism. Militarism debases the human individual to an animated machine. I hate to see our young men wearing the uniforms which, picturesque as they may be, are tokens of the impairment of that individualism which is the noble fruit of a true democratic order. It galls me to hear bodies of our fellow citizens, freemen of a great republic, spoken of as "*troops*." So many muskets, so many cannon, so many horses, *so many men*—a mass of barbarous, death-dealing material for the general to employ against a similar mass, collected from some other nation! The whole thing, my friends, is degrading; as inconsistent with civilization as it is with Christianity. It is as *vulgar* as it is wicked.

The logic of militarism is, I repeat,—might makes right. It is the violent, arrogant, self-willed method employed by nations to enforce their ends instead of securing them by reason, mutual conference and conciliation, in the spirit of justice and law. The possibility of it is a dangerous temptation. There is no falser dictum than that which the great Washington unhappily reëchoed—"in time of peace prepare for war." Far wiser and truer to the facts of history was that saying of Jesus, "They that take the sword shall perish by the sword." The ages bear witness to its truth. The expectation and preparation for war breed war. The maintenance of the pro-

vision for war fosters the war-spirit and makes nations ready to assert their claims by barbarous force, instead of by orderly adjudication. I remarked how, in civilized lands, we have repressed and nearly extirpated all recourse to violence between individuals in their disputes. Orderly adjudication of these is now a fixed fact—it is one of the great triumphs of civilization. We must press for the establishment of international courts, with the confident assurance that when they are provided, the disposition to resort to force for the settlement of international disputes will speedily abate. I cherish an ardent hope both that such courts will be established and that they will serve *rapidly* to curtail the influence of the war-spirit, the practice of warfare and the extension of militarism. Nations will be ashamed to confess that they dare not entrust their causes of dispute to such adjudication. The verdicts of such courts will become the sufficient corrective and assuagement of the false pride which now impels them to refuse justice lest concession should imply weakness. If the populations become, as I think they must become, restive under the awful cost of militarism, the popular demand will require that appeals should be to the courts and not to the senseless ordeal of battles.

What could be more irrational for the settlement of a dispute, than that two nations should choose masses of the most precious thing they have—their young manhood—and hurl them against each other, like so much timber or metal, till the mere physical issue should incline this way or that! A profound immorality underlies the whole method. Might cannot make right. If force is ever to be invoked to maintain right, it can only rightly be used when all just moral methods have been exhausted.

It was a nobly prophetic word, uttered by one of our preachers very lately—"*There is no such thing as a right of conquest. Mere conquest confers no right whatsoever.*" When we weary, friends, of our inhuman massacre of the Philippinos, the obligation of justice towards a people over whom it is not possible that we should acquire by

purchase, or force, any right to rule, will remain the same as ever. The only formula for our dealings with them will be the Golden Rule. We must apply to them the principles of 1776.

Right makes might—right makes might. The strength and security of nations rest in their allegiance to the truth, to every highest ideal and law which they discover. This, which is the teaching of religion, is equally the verdict of history. The progress of civilization has actually consisted, as I have shown you here before, in the gradual ascendancy in communities of the unselfish virtues. Its key-note is the third Beatitude. Let us open our eyes, and, seeing the danger to which our nation is now perilously exposed, use all our influence to bar the extension among us of the war-spirit, and to resist the system of militarism.